

The contribution of traditional vegetables to household food security in two communities of Vihiga and Migori Districts, Kenya.

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Abstract:

Household Food insecurity is a serious recurrent problem concerning Kenyan smallholding farmers for which hunger periods and/or nutritional deficiencies are frequent. Hunger periods are periods of time in which the stocks of food staples, such as maize or cassava, are finished and household food security relies on available cash. The overall goal of this study is to compare the current situation regarding household food security of two sites, in Vihiga and Migori Districts (Western Kenya and Nyanza Provinces respectively) which have different bio-physical, socio-economic and ethno-cultural characteristics. In addition, the role of agrobiodiversity, and more specifically diversity of traditional leafy vegetables, in dietary diversity and household food security is tested. Data collection was done mostly by conducting farm surveys. Three types regarding vulnerability in household food security were identified based on both off farm income (%) and self-sufficiency of staple food production. Dietary results show that maize contribution to energy recommended daily allowances is 59% in Vihiga and 71% in Migori site. Traditional vegetables are widely grown and consumed daily along with the staple maize meal: *ugali*, contributing to micronutrient intake. Priority traditional vegetables include *Amaranthus* sp., *Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp. and *Crotalaria* sp. in Vihiga and *Amaranthus* sp., *Corchorus* sp. and *Solanum nigrum* complex in Migori. Maize self sufficiency and diversity of traditional vegetables are higher in Migori than in Vihiga. Most vulnerable households in Vihiga have a triple unfavourable situation because during their long gap of maize stock cash is needed to buy maize and its prices are much higher due to the high demand. No direct link between agrobiodiversity and household food security has been found. Therefore the role of agrobiodiversity by itself, and more specifically the diversity of traditional vegetables, in household food security might be overrated.